



United States Department of Agriculture

Beaver Meadows Campground Decommissioning Environmental Assessment



Photo of Beaver Meadows Site 5 in 2013, two years after closure. Photo by Linda White, Recreation Planner.



Forest Service
Allegheny National Forest

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For More Information Contact:

Robert T. Fallon
Allegheny National Forest
131 Smokey Lane
Marienville, Pennsylvania 16701
Phone: 814-927-5799
Fax: 814-927-2285
rob.fallon@usda.gov

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Introduction

The Forest Service is proposing to decommission the Beaver Meadows Campground, which is located on the Marienville Ranger District of the Allegheny National Forest.

We have prepared this environmental assessment to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact. This document, as well as the scoping package and other project information, is available on the Allegheny National Forest web site at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57181>.

This environmental assessment was prepared in accordance with the 1978 version of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. Although new regulations became effective on September 14, 2020, this project was initiated before the effective date.

Project Location and Background

The project area encompasses the Beaver Meadows Campground within the Beaver Meadows Recreation Area on the Marienville Ranger District. The project is located in Warrant 3185, Jenks Township, Forest County, Pennsylvania, approximately four miles north of Marienville, Pennsylvania. The campground lies within Management Area 3.0–Even-aged Management.

Beaver Meadows refers to a "...swamp, known locally as Beaver Meadows" as described in a survey document from 1923 (USDA-FS 1923). To improve wildlife habitat in the area, a dam was constructed on Salmon Creek by Work Progress Administration workers from the nearby Blue Jay Camp (Cartwright 2006) between 1936 and 1939. The Beaver Meadows campground was constructed by the Forest Service in the 1960s and was in use until 2011 when it was closed because of continued low occupancy use rates (18.5percent) (USDA-FS 2008).

Public Involvement

On November 19, 2019, the scoping package for the Beaver Meadows Campground Decommissioning project was mailed to interested individuals and organizations and posted on Allegheny National Forest website. The project was listed in the Allegheny National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions starting in the November 2020. Scoping comments were received from 16 individuals or organizations. Our responses to the scoping comments are provided in the Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detail Study section of this environmental assessment and in Appendix A below.

We also consulted with the Absentee-Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Cayuga Nation, Delaware Nation, Delaware Tribe of Indians, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Oneida Indian Nation, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Onondaga Nation, Seneca Nation of Indians, Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma, St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, Shawnee Tribe, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, Tonawanda Band of Seneca, and Tuscarora Nation. No tribal concerns were identified with this project.

Need for the Proposal

In 2008, the Forest Service completed a recreation facility analysis for the Allegheny National Forest. The recreational facility analysis was designed to help the Forest Service align its developed recreation sites with the unique characteristics of the Allegheny National Forest, projected recreation demands, visitor expectation, and revenue opportunities.

The recreation facilities analysis for the Allegheny National Forest showed that the campground part of Beaver Meadows Recreation Area was under-utilized on all scales of measurement – local, regional, and national. The analysis recommended two options for the Beaver Meadows Campground:

- study the area and determine if it was a suitable location for conversion to an ATV campground, or
- if that was not feasible, decommission the campground and remove all its assets.

Conversion of the Beaver Meadows Campground to an ATV campground was considered but dropped from consideration for the reasons discussed below in the Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study section of this environmental assessment. Conversion to an ATV campground is not feasible.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

When preparing an environmental assessment, federal agencies are required to develop and consider alternatives to the proposed action if there are unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources. No unresolved issues were identified by the responsible official or interdisciplinary team. Two alternatives were considered in detail for this analysis: Proposed Action and No Action (Existing Condition).

Proposed Action

We are proposing to decommission the Beaver Meadows Campground. This would include:

- The removal of the storage building, three toilet buildings, playground equipment, concrete pads, all campsite equipment, all internal gates, the gate at campground entrance, pay phone, all buried utility lines, and any other equipment associated with the camping area;
- Decommissioning (full obliteration) all roads within the campground beyond the intersection with the main day use area road and including all spur roads to individual campsites including removal of road surfacing and culverts; and
- Plugging all water wells.

Please note that this proposal does **not** include the Beaver Meadows Day Use Area or hiking trails. The day use parking area, toilet, boat access, picnic areas, bank fishing, pathway across the dam, hiking trails and access to hiking trails will continue to be

maintained for public use. The blueberry site will remain unaffected and access will be by foot from the day use area.

The project would include removal of the storage building and three toilet buildings. The three toilet buildings are structurally sound and could be moved to other locations on the Allegheny National Forest, if possible. However, the storage building is in poor condition and would be demolished, with the material going to an approved landfill. The toilet vaults would be pumped dry and cleaned of any remaining waste material. The vaults would then be broken up and buried and the sites restored to natural conditions. Two remnant concrete pads from prior structures in the campground would also be broken up, buried and the sites restored to natural conditions. Information kiosks would have their electrical components removed and would be relocated to the Little Drummer Trailhead, Spring Creek Horse Trailheads, or other trailheads where needed.

Virtually all the usable campsite furniture (fire rings and picnic tables) has already been removed and dispersed to other campgrounds on the forest. The remaining unusable equipment (mainly wooden picnic tables that are in poor condition) would be disposed in an approved landfill. Wooden site number posts would be removed and disposed.

Culverts under site spurs and the loop roads would be removed. Camp sites and loop and spur roads would be restored to natural conditions. Disturbed soils would be seeded with native species and mulched.

Water wells would be plugged, hydrants removed, and pipes capped. If necessary, some pipes may be removed to allow roads and pads to be restored to natural conditions, but the rest would remain buried to limit ground disturbance. Disturbed soils would be seeded with native species and mulched.

Non-native invasive plant treatments were initiated in the summer of 2019 (approved in the Salmon East decision). Follow-up treatments will occur in the summer of 2020. The site will be monitored to ensure that non-native invasive plant treatments are successful and that these non-native invasive plant species do not re-establish themselves. Additional treatments may be necessary.

No Action—Existing Condition

Under the no-action alternative (existing condition), the proposed activities would not occur. Beaver Meadows Campground would not be decommissioned but would remain closed.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Two alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study as discussed below.

Keep existing roads open and keep the toilets

This alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study because keeping the existing roads within the campground open and keeping the toilets would be similar to the no action alternative (existing condition with the campground closed but not decommissioned). Therefore, it falls within the range of effects analyzed and decision space of the responsible official for the no action and proposed action alternatives.

Conversion to an ATV campground

As mentioned previously, following the recreation facilities analysis, conversion of the Beaver Meadows Campground to an ATV campground was considered but eliminated from detailed study because:

- This would require construction a new ATV trails through wetlands and on road shoulders. This is not feasible due to safety and environmental concerns affecting our ability to safely construct, operate, and maintain the required trail.
- Feedback received from the public after the campground was closed informed us that the area was most valued for the solitude and quiet that the public could now find there. Those values would be lost with construction of an ATV trail.
- Beaver Meadows is an important area for wildlife and plant species. A diversity of habitats exists in proximity to each other that provide food, water, and cover for many species. Components of the lake environment, wetlands, native trees, mast producing shrubs, conifer, plant, and herbaceous cover provide optimum habitat for many species that are sensitive to disturbance.

Design Features for the Proposed Action

The following design features are implementation criteria that prevent undesirable effects from proposed management activities. These design features will be implemented in addition to standards and guidelines from the Allegheny National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

1. If any federally listed species, Regional Forester Sensitive Species, or species with a viability concern is identified prior to or during project implementation, project actions will cease and the district wildlife biologist and/or botanist will be notified to determine potential impacts/effects and to determine potential mitigation measures (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 53**).
2. On-site fill material will be used for burying vaults (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 53**).
3. Certified weed-free straw will be used for erosion control measures, if available (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 53**).
4. Native local genotype seeds will be used for restoration purposes where plant species may need augmented (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 53**).
5. All building structures that are to be removed or demolished will receive a bat emergence survey during the peak usage period to ascertain bat use before they are removed/demolished. Three bat boxes will be installed in the nearby openings prior to demolition or removal (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 81, 82, and 84**).
6. All structures that are to be removed or demolished will be checked for rattlesnakes before they are removed/demolished. If encountered, any rattlesnake will be relocated (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 87**).
7. To the degree possible, avoid and protect milkweed encountered in herbaceous openings, along ditchlines/roads, and recreation campsites when implementing proposals. Protect columbine plants site on campsite #23 and unique plants as

directed by district botanist or biologist. Include milkweed seed/plugs in seed mix when rehabilitating sites (**USDA-FS 2007a, page 80**).

8. Proposed road decommissioning is located more than 220 feet from designated wetlands as recognized by National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) based on GIS data. Follow Forest Plan standards and guidelines regarding *seeps, springs, intermittent, perennial streams, vernal pools and wetlands* (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 77–78**).
9. Protect all known apple trees, crabapples, conifers, and native soft and hard mast shrubs to the degree possible. A potential large resistant ash tree exists adjacent to one of spur roads. Consult wildlife biologist for locations and recommendations before implementation (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 65 and 80**).
10. Building decommissioning and water well plugging should occur when surrounding soils can adequately support the activity. Any disturbance incurred should be reclaimed (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 72–73**).
11. Implement Pennsylvania Best Management Practices for erosion and sediment control (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 72–73**).
12. Seed, fertilizer, and lime should be applied as needed to adequately stabilize disturbed areas that are susceptible to erosion and to encourage revegetation, a soils analysis should be completed to determine appropriate rates for application (**USDA-FS 2007a, pages 72–73**).

Environmental Effects

The purpose of an environmental assessment is to determine whether to make a finding of no significant impact or prepare an environmental impact statement. As a result, our analysis is presented in terms of context and intensity.

Context

For the proposed action and the no action alternatives, the context of the environmental effects is based on the environmental analysis in this environmental assessment. This project was proposed to achieve long-term desired conditions identified in the Forest Plan. The proposed action would achieve Forest Plan goals and meet specific objectives to provide a diverse range of high-quality sustainable recreation opportunities consistent with public demand and resource capability emphasizing locally popular recreation places and those important to the tourism industry. All applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines were applied to project design.

The project area includes approximately 33 acres (less than 0.006 percent of the National Forest System lands within the Allegheny National Forest). The proposed action would decommission 38 developed campsites of the 829 developed campsites and cabins on the Allegheny National Forest and 1.7 miles of access roads. The project would be implemented within the next five years.

Intensity Factor #1: Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Recreation

There are 829 developed campsites and cabins located within 10 developed campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest. Thirty-eight (38) campsites are in the Beaver Meadows Campground. There are also numerous dispersed campsites scattered throughout the Allegheny National Forest. An analysis completed for the 2007 Forest Plan Revision showed that of all the developed campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest, Beaver Meadows and Tracy Ridge Campgrounds had the lowest overall occupancy, both with 19 percent, of the developed campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest between 1997 and 2004. Loleta Campground's overall occupancy was 30 percent during the same time period (USDA-FS 2007b, page 3-302). Low occupancy at Beaver Meadows Campground continued at 18.5 percent during the Recreation Facilities Analysis (USDA-FS 2008).

Beaver Meadows campground has been closed since 2011. Electricity was shut down in 2012 and the pay phone was removed. In 2014, recreation staff began moving picnic tables and fire rings to Loleta, and Twin Lakes campgrounds to replace broken or missing site furniture and to Kelly Pines campground, which previously had no site furniture. This was done to prevent asset loss through deterioration, vandalism, or theft, and there was a need at the other campgrounds. The few picnic tables left behind were beyond their useful lifespan and could not be re-used.

While no actual count was kept, only a few phone calls have been received each year asking if the campground would be re-opened. Once or twice in a summer season, the recreation staff mowing the day use area and cleaning the toilet would discover people parked in the day use area and camping behind the gate in the old campground. These people were informed of the closure and asked to leave. The campground area has not been mowed or maintained, so over the years, vegetation has reclaimed sites, spurs, and roads, trees have tipped over in windstorms or lost branches, and the area has started the natural reclamation process. The road system has been cleared occasionally to allow administrative access to the buildings, trail, and the blueberry patch to inspect structures, trail conditions, and fencing. The buildings have not been maintained, but visitors have continued to use and clean at least one of the toilet buildings while walking the roads or camping despite the closure. While there is some noise caused by activities in nearby camps on private land and the sound of ATVs, dirt bikes, and snowmobiles when the Penoke Bike Trail/Allegheny Snowmobile Loop Connector 28 are open, the silence of Beaver Meadows has deepened without the occupation of campers. Both before and after the closure, the quietness of the area has been cited by users as one of their favorite things about the area.

The Beaver Meadows Campground lies within Management Area 3.0 (Even-aged Management), which provides a range of recreation opportunities in a roaded natural setting. The roaded natural setting would be maintained under both alternatives.

Proposed action

The buildings, except for the storage building, are in good condition and could provide needed facilities elsewhere on a new vault if they can be dismantled and moved. As was shown in the early 2000s when Bear Creek Recreation Area and Red Mill Campground were decommissioned, buildings left behind often become targets for vandalism.

Removal of the buildings and toilets would remove the possibility of vandalism on the structures and would discourage camping behind the gate. The storage building is already in poor condition and removal would eliminate it as a potential safety hazard and attractive nuisance. The assets would be removed from inspection schedules and employee time could be spent on other tasks.

Removal of the information kiosks would benefit other recreation areas, such as Little Drummer Trailhead, where the kiosk was vandalized and burned in 2014. These kiosks are generally in good condition and can provide more years of service. The public would benefit from the information posted on them and they would be in more visible locations, which could protect them from abuse. They have little utility where they are, with the campground closed and little of the day use exposed to them. A smaller information panel could be installed in the picnic area or near the boat launch to provide day use information.

The wooden, numbered site posts are generally in poor condition, particularly underground, and have little utility elsewhere since all the other camping areas already have identification markers of some kind, mostly flexible fiberglass posts. Removing them assists in the restoration of the site to natural conditions and has little impact on the use of the area. Similarly, removal of the remaining wooden picnic tables clears the area of human detritus and allows for a more natural condition without impacting use.

Removal of the roads, camping spurs, and culverts would have the biggest impact on human use of the area. The road system is currently used for access to parts of the Beaver Meadows and Seldom Seen trails, the blueberry patch, and for general walking purposes by both locals and visitors to the area. The road system is wide, generally flat, and traverses a pine plantation, hardwood forest and small openings where the campsites and playground were located. Its profile makes it an ideal feature for people whose abilities don't lend themselves to hiking the trail system over roots, rocks, and stream crossings, and the views are pleasant and peaceful. There is no data to show exactly how much use the road system receives as a walking path, so it is difficult to assess the impact of the removal. The nearby Knox-Kane railroad grade could absorb some of this use, however the nature of the experience would be very different, with the railroad grade as an out-and-back experience with some portions near the highway or private homes, and the Beaver Meadows campground road as a series of two loops tucked away in a more remote area of the forest. Noise from the use of the heavy equipment would temporarily change the nature of the user experience in the area, but this would be short in duration and could be timed for when use of the day-use area is generally low. The portion of Beaver Meadows Trail system that uses the campground road as part of its loop would be closed during this project, requiring hikers to use Seldom Seen Trail to complete the loop around the lake until the project is complete and the trail is re-established. Following campground decommissioning, access to the blueberry site would be by walking trail only, including administrative access. This could prevent some use from occurring.

Ecologically, removal of the road system and culverts would allow for more natural drainage of overland flow, with the possibility of some ponding or dissipation of water that would allow for the spread of moist area plants and other species habitat. Plugging of the water wells would remove a safety hazard that could exist if pipes became exposed over time or protruded out of the ground. It would allow the removal of concrete pads and drain grates and help restore the area to a natural condition. Since the handles have

been removed from the pumps and spigots, this would have little impact to current use of the area as visitors do not currently expect to find potable water in the area.

The decommissioned campground would be closed to primitive dispersed camping until the site has been fully restored. Since the open campground only had an occupancy rate of 19 percent and only occasional users are found now camping illegally behind the gate, decommissioning the campground is not expected to have further impact. Visitors to the Beaver Meadows Campground have long ago moved to other locations for camping, including developed sites such as Loleta campground, the Kellettville Army Corps of Engineers campground, and private campgrounds near Marienville. Those seeking a more primitive camping experience have moved to other areas within the Allegheny National Forest that provide that opportunity, such as Salmon Creek, Tionesta Creek, Millstone Creek, Spring Creek and the Clarion River. Allowing primitive dispersed camping within the decommissioned area could be considered sometime in the future, as was done at Bear Creek Recreation Area and Red Mill Campground.

No action

Under the no action, the campground would remain closed. The buildings would slowly deteriorate over time. The storage shed would become a potential hazard more quickly than the other buildings because of its already poor condition. All the buildings could become subject to vandalism although it is likely that the toilet buildings would continue to be used and maintained by visitors walking the roads until such a time as weather or vandals accelerated the deterioration process. These assets would continue to show on property inventories and would be scheduled for regular inspections, but maintenance would not take place. Eventually, each building would become a potential health and safety hazard as time goes by.

The kiosks, like the buildings, would continue in a slow deterioration process from lack of maintenance. They too could become a safety hazard as posts rotted and heavy wooden framework fell apart. The number posts and picnic tables would remain until nature reclaimed them. While unlikely to be particularly hazardous, they would become a sad visual reminder of better days.

Roads, spurs, and culverts would remain in place. Without maintenance, vegetation, including trees and vines, would begin to take over the surface, although the contour of the roadbed would remain visible for decades, similar to logging roads of the area's past. Visitors would continue to use the roads and walking paths for as long as that remained a viable option.

Water wells and spigots would be unmaintained and could become a safety hazard and a vandalism target. Concrete pads, wooden support posts, and metal pipes would eventually fail and could leave holes or jagged pipes for the unwary cross-country explorer. Wells without housing would be particularly dangerous as the open holes could lead to entrapment or serious injury.

Vegetation

Proposed Action

Effects to vegetation are typically evaluated in context of changes to structural habitat, forest type, and forest health. Here, no effects are anticipated under the proposed action because:

- The proposed action does not include any vegetation management activities.
- Trees and shrubs will only be cut on an as-needed basis for safety or operational reasons.
- Any areas that are disturbed will be re-vegetated after decommissioning occurs.

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, there would be no effects to structural habitat, forest type, or forest health.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Please see the discussion provided below in context of intensity factor #9.

Regional Forester Sensitive Species

Specialist reports for plants and wildlife have been prepared for this project. They may be found in the project file and are incorporated by reference.

Proposed Action

If the proposed action is implemented, there will be no impacts to nine sensitive plant species¹. The remaining 27 sensitive plant species², however, may experience adverse impacts to individuals. These impacts, however, are not likely to cause a loss of viability in the planning area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing. See pages 20 to 24 of the botany report for more information. Similar determinations are reached in terms of cumulative impacts (see pages 24 to 25 of the botany report).

Since scoping, the eastern box turtle has been added to the Allegheny National Forest Regional Forester Sensitive Species list. If the proposed action is implemented, there will be no impact to 28 sensitive wildlife species³ considered. However, the remaining seven

¹ Blue wild indigo, twining screwstem, lanceleaf moonwort, blunt-lobed grapefern, least moonwort, blazing star/fairywand, white fawnlily, showy orchid, and checkered rattlesnake plantain

² Red baneberry, Bartram shadbush, large toothwort, awned sedge, boreal bog sedge, autumn coralroot, tufted hairgrass, mountain wood fern, rough cotton-sedge, queen-of-the-prairie, creeping snowberry, lesser rattlesnake-plantain, false Indian plantain, butternut, thread rush, American ginseng, Philadelphia panicgrass, wild quinine, Hooker's orchid, bristly black currant, swamp red currant, stalked bulrush, strict blue-eyed grass, boreal starwort, Canada yew, crippled crane fly, and great-spurred violet.

³ Little brown myotis, tri-colored bat, northern flying squirrel, northern goshawk, Swainson's thrush, eastern hellbender, creek heelsplitter, long-solid, rainbow, round pigtoe, threeridge, Wabash pigtoe, white heelsplitter, green-faced clubtail, harpoon clubtail, Maine snaketail, mocha emerald, mustached clubtail, rapids clubtail, sable culbait, ski-tipped emerald, zebra clubtail, burbot, mountain brook lamprey, mountain madtom, northern madtom, Ohio lamprey, and spotted darter

species,⁴ including the eastern box turtle, may experience adverse impacts to individuals. These impacts, however, are not likely to cause a loss of viability in the planning area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing. See pages 16 to 21 of the wildlife report for more information. Similar determinations are reached in terms of cumulative impacts (see pages 24 to 27 of the wildlife report).

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, there would be no effects to any Regional Forester sensitive species.

Species with Viability Concerns

Proposed Action

We reviewed the project for potential effects on 11 species with viability concerns, and determined that:

- There is suitable habitat within the project area for nine species (black-throated blue warbler, golden-winged warbler, great blue heron, osprey, raven, red-shouldered hawk, coal sink, Jefferson salamander, and Weigand's sedge).
- Three of the nine species have been documented in the project area (great blue heron, raven, and osprey).
- There would be no adverse cumulative effects to any of the 11 species, but habitat for some species may be slightly altered. Forest Plan standards and guidelines (USDA-FS 2007a, pages 74–89) and project design features would protect specialized habitat and features for several of these species.

For additional information, please see pages 21 to 24 of the project wildlife report and pages 15 and 26 of the botany report.

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, there would be no effects to any species with viability concerns.

Scenery

Proposed Action

Effects to scenery are anticipated to be minimal as little to no cutting of trees or shrubs should occur. Disturbed areas would be revegetated following proposed decommissioning. No changes to the Scenery Integrity Level (high) or Concern Level (Concern Level 1 – Forest Road 282) are anticipated with implementation of this project.

⁴ monarch butterfly, eyed-brown, West Virginia white, wood turtle, eastern box turtle, four-toed salamander, and timber rattlesnake.

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, there would be no effects to Scenery Integrity Levels or Concern Levels.

Non-native invasive plants

Proposed Action

Ground-disturbing activities associated with the proposed action may increase the susceptibility of the project to invasion and spread of non-native invasive plants. Several non-native invasive plants currently occur in the project area and are presently being treated (approved with the Salmon East decision) with appropriate herbicides. The potential for the introduction and spread of non-native invasive plants would be minimized by application of standard resources protection measures designed to prevent, detect, and eliminate non-native invasive plant infestations from the project area.

No Action

Under the no action, non-native invasive plant treatments approved with the Salmon East decision would continue. There would be no additional effects beyond those described in the Salmon East Environmental Assessment.

Soil

Proposed Action

Effects to soil are anticipated to be minimal with implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Pennsylvania best management practices, and project design features. Disturbed areas would be revegetated following proposed decommissioning.

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, there would be no additional effects to soils.

Water

Proposed Action

Negative effects to water quantity and quality are anticipated to be minimal with implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Pennsylvania best management practices, and project design features. There are expected to be improvements to water quantity and quality by decreasing runoff on compacted soils and allowing infiltration. There are no floodplains in the project area. There is one small wetland near campsite #1. The compacted areas of this campsite would be removed to allow for expansion of this wetland area. No negative impacts are expected. Disturbed areas would be revegetated following proposed decommissioning.

No Action

Under the no action, none of the proposed activities would occur, and therefore, no potential improvements to water quantity or quality or wetland expansion would result from the proposed road decommissioning.

Intensity Factor #2: The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would avoid adverse impacts to public health and safety through implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Pennsylvania best management practices, project design features, Office of Safety and Health Administration requirements, and standard operating safety procedures. Actions, such as warning signs and others listed below, are standard precautionary measures that would be employed.

- Implementation of the proposed campground decommissioning may cause temporary disruptions to the day use area and the facilities that support day use at the Beaver Meadows Recreation Area.
- Heavy equipment traffic on forest road 282 (entrance road to Beaver Meadows) may necessitate temporary closure of the day use area and associated trails.
- The day use parking area near the boat launch and vault toilet building may be used to stage equipment or materials.

Plugging of the water wells would remove a safety hazard that could exist if pipes became exposed over time or protruded out of the ground.

No Action

The kiosks and buildings would continue in a slow deterioration process from lack of maintenance and could become a safety hazard.

Water wells and spigots would be unmaintained and could become a safety hazard and a vandalism target.

Concrete pads, wooden support posts, and metal pipes would eventually fail and could leave holes or jagged pipes for the unwary cross-country explorer. Wells without housing would be particularly dangerous as the open holes could lead to entrapment or serious injury.

Intensity Factor #3: Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Please see the discussion further below regarding historic or cultural resources. Regarding other potentially unique characteristics:

- The proposed action is not located within, and will not affect, any of the following areas: wilderness, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, national recreation areas, scenic areas, historic areas, research natural areas, or experimental forests.
- The project area contains 24.7 acres of soils that are designated as prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance. Decommissioning roads, campsites, and

other facilities would result in up to 5.3 acres of designated farmland being restored eventually to forest. None of the proposed activities would result in designated farmland being converted to non-forest or non-agricultural uses.

- There are less than 0.01 acres of wetlands in the project area. Forest Plan standards and guidelines and Pennsylvania best management practices will also be implemented to protect these areas. The project is expected to improve this wetland by allowing it to expand to a more natural area. There are no floodplains located within the project area.

Intensity Factor #4: The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Although we have not decommissioned any campgrounds recently, the activities proposed here (road decommissioning, facility decommissioning, well plugging, etc.) are routine on the Allegheny National Forest and throughout the National Forest System. The effects are well known, and do not present any substantial scientific controversy.

Intensity Factor #5: The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The activities proposed here (road decommissioning, facility decommissioning, well plugging, etc.) are routine on the Allegheny National Forest and throughout the National Forest System. The effects are well known, and do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

Intensity Factor #6: The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This project is limited to the specific activities proposed above in context of campground decommissioning. As a result, the decision made here will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and will not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Intensity Factor #7: Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Cumulative effects have been addressed in context of beneficial and adverse effects. Please see the discussion above for intensity factor #1.

Intensity Factor #8: The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

A cultural resource survey was completed for the project area and submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office for their concurrence. Concurrence from the State Historic

Preservation Office was received on the *No Historic Properties Affected* finding for the project. In addition, any contracts would contain a provision for the protection of cultural resources if any sites are discovered during operations.

Intensity Factor #9: The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Proposed Action

Currently, there is no designated critical habitat for any federally threatened or endangered species on the Allegheny National Forest; therefore, implementation will not affect any designated critical habitat. However, since scoping, the longsolid mussel has been proposed for federal listing as threatened. Along with the proposed listing is the designation of critical habitat for the longsolid mussel, which would include 99 miles of the Allegheny River. The longsolid mussel was analyzed as a Regional Forester Sensitive Species for this project and a “no impact” determination was reached in the project biological evaluation. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on the longsolid mussel or its proposed critical habitat.

Also, since scoping, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found that adding the monarch butterfly to the list of threatened and endangered species is warranted but precluded by work on higher-priority listing actions. With this decision, the monarch becomes a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act and its status will be reviewed each year until it is no longer a candidate. The monarch butterfly was analyzed as a Regional Forester Sensitive Species for this project and a “may adversely impact individuals, but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the Planning Area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing” determination was reached in the project biological evaluation.

On August 28, 2019, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed a 5-year review for the Northeastern bulrush. The review recommends that the species be delisted due to recovery. The 5-year review can be found at https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five_year_review/doc6123.pdf.

Project-specific biological assessments (for plants and wildlife) were prepared, are available in the project file, and are incorporated by reference. A no effect determination was reached for all nine federally listed threatened or endangered species (northern long-eared bat, small whorled pogonia, northeastern bulrush, northern riffleshell, clubshell mussel, rayed-bean, sheepnose, snuffbox, and rabbitsfoot).

No Action

Under the no action alternative, a no effect determination was also reached for the nine federally listed threatened or endangered species as none of the proposed activities would occur.

Intensity Factor #10: Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action complies with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

The Forest Service consulted with the individuals/organizations on the NEPA mailing list, subsurface mineral owners, Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies (listed below) during the development of this environmental assessment:

Federal, State, and Local Agencies

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
Pennsylvania Game Commission
Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office

Tribes

The Forest Service consulted with the 15 federally recognized Tribes that have historic ties to the area.

Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
Shawnee Tribe
Cayuga Nation
Delaware Tribe Historic Preservation Representatives
Delaware Nation
Oneida Indian Nation
Oneida Nation of Wisconsin
Onondaga Nation
Seneca Nation of Indians
Seneca-Cayuga Nation
St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Tribal Historic Preservation
Tonawanda Seneca Nation
Tuscarora Nation

Others

Elk County Commissioners
Forest County Commissioners
Highland Township
Jenks Township
Ridgway Borough
Spring Creek Township

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Appendix A: Response to Scoping Comments

Introduction

This report summarizes the scoping process for the Beaver Meadows Campground Decommissioning project and presents an analysis of the scoping comments received from the public. The scoping period began on November 19, 2019 when the scoping package was mailed to interested individuals and organizations, including subsurface mineral owners and other interested parties. The scoping package was also posted on the Allegheny National Forest website on November 21, 2019. The project was listed in the Allegheny National Forest schedule of proposed actions (SOPA) starting with the January 2019 issue. The scoping comment period for this project ended on December 20, 2019. Sixteen (16) individuals/organizations (listed below) submitted scoping comments.

- Brian M. Wargo
- LeAnne Davis
- Richard J. Mauk
- Todd Brunermer
- Ron Moyer
- Forest County Sportmen's Club, Inc
- Donna Oberlander, State Representative
- Jim Hoffman
- Audria Salapata
- Colleen L. Christian
- James Biel
- Forest County Conservation District & Planning Department
- Kingley Township Supervisors
- Forest County Commissioners
- Congressman Glenn Thompson
- Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, Kirk Johnson

The respondents' comments are included in the project file and summarized here. One of the respondents is supportive of the proposed action. Our responses to the remaining comments and concerns are provided below or in the Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study section of this environmental assessment. No unresolved issues were identified by the responsible official or interdisciplinary team that led to formulation of another action alternative.

Comment 1: *Many of the respondents asked the Forest Service to reconsider decommissioning the campground portion of Beaver Meadows Recreation Area and to find a way to reopen the campground. There are several efforts underway to revitalize the region and bring more visitors to the Allegheny National Forest ... there is a greater need for campgrounds, especially Beaver Meadows.*

Response: Beaver Meadows provides the classic Forest Service front country camping experience – pleasant setting, sheltered sites, trails, surface water, hardened camping surface, picnic table, fire ring, drinking water, and vault toilet – and many respondents spoke of characteristics such as the “primitive”, “quiet”, “tranquil”, “unique” feel of the camping experience. It was very clear from the comments that many users have had memorable experiences at Beaver Meadows; but the over-riding concern is that there are

simply not enough folks who have been seeking this experience. Although a great place to camp and visit, this campground provides an experience that not enough people are looking for on the forest and which is available at other locations on the forest. It is not a question of quality as much as it is providing too much of something that people want less. Consideration was given to closing the day use area and just one loop of the campground; however, this is a case of the Forest Service providing what it traditionally provides, but the public utilizes less and less. Proximity to Marienville is key factor in keeping the day use area open and well maintained, as it provides a local attraction and an Allegheny National Forest connection for visitors to that community.

Loleta and Beaver Meadows campgrounds are relatively close, 6 miles and 4 miles respectively, to the center of Marienville. Use figures from the analysis for the 2007 Forest Plan revision and the recreation facilities analysis showed that the Beaver Meadows Campground was underutilized. Even in July, the busiest month of the season, all the campers utilizing Beaver Meadows (38 campsites) and Loleta campgrounds (38 campsites) could stay in Loleta Campground and it would only take up about 70 percent of the Loleta Campground capacity. There are also two privately-owned campgrounds closer to Marienville that provide camping. Recent trends in dispersed and developed recreation on the Allegheny National Forest still indicate that one Forest Service campground, Loleta, in the vicinity of Marienville can more than meet the demand. Loleta, in addition to providing developed day use and camping facilities, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Forest Service is committed to maintaining and interpreting that site. We have considered the potential for the Beaver Meadows Campground to serve a different recreational need, particularly as an ATV campground; but the site is unsuited to motorized recreation, and the vast majority of the limited public comment regarding this site has focused on the quiet, peace, and tranquility of the location. It is difficult to let go of a place where people have fond memories, but not enough people were building new memories there. The reality for the Forest Service is that any funds used to restore, maintain, and operate Beaver Meadows Campground, would have to be taken away from other developed campgrounds and recreation areas on the Allegheny National Forest where the memories are just as keen, but the use and need for investment is so much more immediate.

Comment 2: *The scoping report cited a study, done over 10 years ago, as to the underutilization of the facility. Even if the information was correct at that time, you must agree that certainly this area of the National Forest has changed since that time. The surrounding area is now part of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, which promotes ecotourism and outdoor recreation opportunities not just at the State level, but as a cooperative across private and public interests. Recently the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has invested well over a million dollars to develop Marienville in to a "Four Season Trail Hub Community" working to draw visitors to the area. Additional funds have been invested by the Appalachian Regional Commission, private sources, local citizens, and Jenks Township itself. The Forest Service has invested also to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars. The project is just beginning to undergo brick and mortar construction, but the benefits of the investment are apparent in the increased business and tourist traffic within the entire Route 66/Allegheny National Forest Corridor.*

Response: The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative was launched in 2003, and the Allegheny National Forest has been working collaboratively with the Department of Conservation

and Natural Resources Pennsylvania Wilds team since 2005. The Forest Service has been an active member of the Pennsylvania Wilds marketing, natural resources, and planning teams in the past, and, with the formation of the Pennsylvania Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, the Forest Service remains a dedicated contributor to the planning and natural resources teams. In addition, the Forest Service worked closely with the Pennsylvania Wilds on a Recreation Assessment for the Clarion River that spawned multiple projects to enhance recreation opportunities within the Wild and Scenic River corridor. The Forest Service participated in the inaugural Pennsylvania Wilds Balancing Nature and Commerce Workshop in 2007 and has participated in numerous Pennsylvania Wilds workshops and strategy sessions over the past 13 years.

The Forest Service participated in the initial strategy and planning session for the Knox-Kane Rail-to-Trail with representatives from Pennsylvania Wilds and the four counties through which the trail corridor passes and has been a partner throughout the development of the Rail-to-Trail project. This has included providing funding towards the survey of the corridor, as well as funding for the development of Marienville as a trail hub, and the conversion of the railbed in Jenks Township into the multiple use trail it is today.

In 2015, the Forest Service participated in the Forest County Local Foods, Local Places program to promote local business/resource connection, identify economic development potential, and brand the county.

In November of 2016, the Allegheny National Forest hosted an Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Summit at the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford to explore private and public recreation opportunities within the Allegheny National Forest subregion of the Pennsylvania Wilds, as well as in the bordering counties in New York. Dozens of local and regional private and public partners worked with us to identify ways to complement and potentially expand recreation and tourism within the subregion.

The point here is that the Forest Service has been an active and committed partner to the recreation initiatives serving the Pennsylvania Wilds, the Allegheny National Forest subregion of the Wilds, Forest County, and the Marienville area. It is within the context of this involvement that we have proposed the closure and decommissioning of the Beaver Meadows campground.

From 1994 through 2010, the last year of operation, Beaver Meadows Campground never saw use of more than 33 percent of capacity (1996). And in 2008, that use rate dipped to 16 percent of capacity. In 2010, even at a use rate of 22 percent of capacity, only Tracy Ridge campground (10 percent) had a lower use rate than Beaver Meadows among the 11 full-service campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest. The deferred maintenance in the nine campgrounds that exceeded Beaver Meadows amounted to millions of dollars. The concessionaire operating the Allegheny National Forest campgrounds could not recover their cost of operating Beaver Meadows and asked to be relieved of that responsibility. The Forest Service closed the campground in 2011 while options were considered. The use rate at Loleta Campground has remained steady at 25-35 percent since Beaver Meadows closed indicating that there was no spike in demand for the developed camping experience that had been provided at Beaver Meadows. This was even the case in 2020, when use of facilities on the Allegheny National Forest increased across the board.

Following a decade of relatively flat funding levels for recreation management on the Allegheny National Forest and an increasing backlog of deferred maintenance, the time has come to decommission the Beaver Meadows campground and focus future investment on those other Allegheny National Forest campgrounds that the public has consistently used with greater frequency.

Even with passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020, and the recreation investment opportunities that presents for national forest and national parks across the country, Beaver Meadows would be among the lowest priorities on the Allegheny National Forest for funding even if it were to remain open. As it stands, the Allegheny National Forest has been quite successful in securing Great American Outdoors Act funds for critical projects such as Kiasutha Recreation Area (\$2 million over 3 years), Longhouse Scenic Drive (\$18 million over 4 years), Sugar Bay on the Allegheny Reservoir (\$450,000 bridge replacement), and \$100,000 to improvements on the Minister Creek and Morrison Run Trails. For the Marienville Ranger District alone, there are several priorities for future funding requests through Great American Outdoors Act and other sources, including Irwin Run Canoe Launch on the Clarion River, the Marienville ATV Connector, Loleta and Twin Lakes Recreation Areas, the Spring Creek Horse Trail network, Laurel Mill trails and trailhead, and Brush Hollow Trails, to name a few. To be competitive for such funds, the Allegheny National Forest must propose to invest funds in infrastructure in places the public has demonstrated where and what it values the most with such infrastructure. Since occupancy rates at Beaver Meadows were comparatively low, even at its 25-year peak, future Great American Outdoors Act funding opportunities would most likely go toward sites with greater public demand.

Comment 3: *Other events continue to evolve nearby, the Kane Viaduct Visitors center, the Firefly Festival, changes in Pennsylvania's hunting seasons and the Declaration of the Clarion River as Wild and Scenic and the designation as the winner of the River of the Year Award. Awards for the Allegheny River from various sources also are abundant. In fact, even the Allegheny National Forest itself was voted as the #2 Camping destination in Pennsylvania. On the same day the request for comment on decommissioning Beaver Meadows arrived, the camping award was announced in the news media. This fact alone makes a strong case against the decommissioning action.*

Response: In 2015, the Allegheny National Forest was named one of the Eight Top Places to Camp in Pennsylvania by visitpa.com. In June 2019, the Allegheny National Forest was named the #2 camping destination in the United States for 2019 by hipcamp.com. This is great recognition for the Allegheny National Forest and the surrounding region, and both occurred after Beaver Meadows Campground was closed in 2011. The scoping letter seeking public input on the proposal to decommission Beaver Meadows Campground was mailed on November 20, 2019.

Comment 4: *The investment and development have caused pressure on other area organized camping areas and have created a need for, and indeed a demand for, this type of facility. The Beaver Meadows Area is exactly the type of area that can fit into the Cooperative Puzzle. The asset provides tremendous potential for future uses. The study rationalizes that because it has not been deemed suitable for ATV camping that it should be decommissioned. The lack of other options within the recommendation show a startling lack of vision into what the last ten years have brought to the region. Certainly,*

the investment and development in the last 5-10 years have opened the door to opportunities that were not apparent or even dreamed of before 2010.

Response: The data does not support the assertion of increased pressure on other area organized camping areas.

Kellettville Campground (managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers) is situated on the shore of Tionesta Creek, with 20 sites and services similar to Beaver Meadows campground. In 2018, this campground was used at 31 percent of capacity. In 2020, this campground showed a steady level of use, generating net camping revenue of \$12,300.

Tionesta Campground (also managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers) is situated on Tionesta Reservoir, with 125 full-service sites, including bathhouses, water, flush toilets, electric and more. In 2018, this campground was used at 61 percent of capacity. Similar in facilities to Willow Bay Recreation Area on the Allegheny National Forest, this site generated net camping revenue of \$217,000 in 2020.

As mentioned earlier, Loleta Campground (a Forest Service campground managed by concessionaire Allegheny Site Management) is situated 6 miles south of Marienville along Millstone Creek, with 20 electric sites, 2 group sites, and 18 standard sites (which are similar to campsites in Beaver Meadows Campground) and includes water, flush toilets and vault toilets, and a bathhouse. In 2018, this campground was used at 27 percent of capacity, with income of \$31,000 in camping revenue. In 2019 the main waterline was damaged, and water was not available in the campground until July 4, so use figures that year are unreliable, but the concessionaire reported camping income of \$27,000. In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, Loleta saw an increase to \$34,000 in camping revenue for the season.

Chapman State Park, located on Chapman Dam reservoir, approximately 30 miles north of Beaver Meadows, has 81 campsites and 3 cottages (the dam underwent repairs in 2019). Cook Forest State Park, located along the Clarion River, approximately 20 miles south of Beaver Meadows, has 235 campsites and 20 cabins. Clear Creek State Park, also located along the Clarion River approximately 20 miles south of Beaver Meadows, has 81 campsites and 24 cabins and yurts. Clear Creek State Forest, also 20 miles south of Beaver Meadows, has 5 primitive campsites. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources reported an increase in 2020 of 26 percent in visitation to state parks from the prior year. None of the parks mentioned above were in the Top 10 in increased use.

Looking at other Forest Service campgrounds across the Allegheny National Forest, all operated by Allegheny Site Management, use rates have increased since 2006 in sites associated with the Allegheny Reservoir, while other sites have seen some increase or have remained static over the same time period. Note that a sliding fee scale was instituted in 2020 that allowed for higher rates in weekends and holidays.

Willow Bay (Allegheny Reservoir) – Improved campground with electric hookups and showers – 104 campsites and 11 cabins for 2021 season

- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$130,000 annually in camping revenue. There was an upward trend from \$86,000 in 2006 to \$194,000 in 2015. These numbers likely included cabin rentals beginning in 2012.

- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$184,600 in camping revenue, including cabin rentals.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$235,000, including cabin rentals. In this year, the concessionaire separated cabin rental revenue from camping revenue, so the totals were approximately \$152,000 in camping revenue and \$83,000 in cabin rental revenue.

Red Bridge (Allegheny Reservoir) – Improved campground with electric hookups and showers – 67 campsites and 2 cabins for 2021 season

- Red Bridge was renovated in 2006, and revenue figures were unreliable from 2007-2009.
- From 2010-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$97,000 annually in camping revenue. There was an upward trend from \$73,000 in 2010 to \$130,000 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$134,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$158,000; including cabin rental revenue of nearly \$24,000. So, the totals were approximately \$134,000 in camping revenue and \$24,000 in cabin rental revenue.

Kiasutha (Allegheny Reservoir) – Improved campground with electric hookups and showers – 98 campsites for 2021 season

- Kiasutha was closed for a part of 2009 for renovations, but this work was halted prematurely due to a funding shortage and work was never resumed.
- From 2010-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$65,000 annually in camping revenue (not including 2009). There was an upward trend from \$56,000 in 2010 to \$95,000 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$87,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$127,000.

Dew Drop (Allegheny Reservoir) – Improved campground with electric hookups and showers – 74 campsites for 2021 season

- Use at Dew Drop may have been influenced by the opening of the Jakes Rocks Epic Mountain Biking Trail in 2017.
- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$49,000 annually in camping revenue. There was an upward trend from \$34,000 in 2010 to \$61,000 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$76,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$100,000.

Tracy Ridge (Near Allegheny Reservoir) – Primitive campground with vault toilets and water – 45 campsites for 2021 season

- In 2016, two loops of the Tracy Ridge Campground were closed, reducing available campsites by half to the current 45.
- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$8,400 annually in camping revenue. There was a downward trend from \$10,500 in revenue in 2006 and \$9,600 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$15,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$30,000.

Buckaloons (Allegheny River) – Improved campground with electric hookups and showers – 59 campsites and 1 group site for 2021 season

- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$52,000 annually in camping revenue (not including 2009). There was an upward trend from \$55,000 in 2010 to \$70,000 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$71,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$100,000.

Hearts Content (Hearts Content) – Primitive campground with vault toilets and water – 27 campsites and 1 group site for 2021 season

- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$9,000 annually in camping revenue. There was an upward trend from 7,000 in 2008 to \$11,500 in 2012, with a drop to \$10,000 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$14,500 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$21,500.

Minister Creek (Tionesta Creek) – Primitive campground with vault toilet and water – 6 campsites for 2021 season

- From 2006-2015, this recreation area averaged nearly \$4,300 annually in camping revenue. There was some annual variation, but little change during this period, with \$4,800 in revenue in 2006 and \$4,700 in 2015.
- From 2016-2019, this recreation area averaged nearly \$6,000 annually in camping revenue.
- In 2020, when outdoor recreation activity increased across the United States, this recreation area showed camping revenue of nearly \$7,000.

There are other developed campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest that serve a specific use and are not reliable comparisons. This includes the five “boat-to” campgrounds on the Allegheny Reservoir and Kelly Pines horse campground.

Twin Lakes campground was closed as a fee site in 2017 due to water and waste-water deficiencies, low use, and operational costs. This campground has been run by volunteers for the past three seasons (and the current season) on a donation basis. Volunteers conduct routine maintenance, but infrastructure investment has been deferred.

Comment 5: *The plan to remove a viable site from the heart of the region that others have successfully invested in, promoting the very items the Forest Service already possesses at Beaver Meadows, based on what we feel to be dated information, is indeed a poor choice of action. The asset exists and is viable. Camping areas provide a vital link to tourism of the area and are difficult and costly to initiate from scratch.*

Response: See response to comments 1, 2, 3, and 4 above. Camping areas do provide a link to tourism. Yet, based on the very current data cited in the response to comment 4, the demand for the kind of camping once provided at Beaver Meadows is being well met at similar locations like Hearts Content, Kellettville, and the primitive loop at Loleta, all of which continue to be underutilized. The focus for investment in recreation infrastructure is in locations where public use is trending upwards.

Comment 6: *Organized camping areas decrease the environmental impact of scattered sites that receive heavy use. We feel that the decommissioning of the site provides no real environmental benefit to the area, decreases the overall utilization of the area, narrows the possibility for future utilization, and the financial concerns connected to the campground area could be reasonably addressed if it was made a priority within the Allegheny National Forest. Rather than decommission a viable area that is already environmentally impacted, we urge the National Forest Services to consider that with the changes that have occurred and will occur in the very near future, it would make better use of its finances to look at Beaver Meadows from a more modern perspective. To invest in the existing Beaver Meadows campground asset instead of exploring decommissioning it. The opportunities for sportsmen, tourists, or just regular people to experience at Beaver Meadows are extraordinary, but only if the facility can be retained, for as the saying goes “once something is gone it will never come back”.*

Response: See response to comments 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Even with well-developed campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest, with services such as electric, flush toilets and showers, many recreationists still choose to camp at dispersed, undeveloped non-fee locations across the Allegheny National Forest. This use exists regardless of the developed or even primitive camping facilities provided by the Forest Service because it is part of the culture and history of recreation on this and most national forests. It is by design that a person can camp anywhere they want on a national forest (except where there are necessary closures for resource protection). If people wish to have access to developed facilities and service, these are typically fee sites, and, ironically, they can camp only in designated locations. It is also important to note that, while the public can generally camp anywhere on a national forest, they can’t drive anywhere on a national forest. For the Allegheny National Forest, most of the dispersed, undeveloped non-fee camping occurs in places where people are allowed to drive motor vehicles, and generally occurs where those roads take people close to streams and rivers.

Comment 7: *One respondent requested increasing the size of the Penoke Unroaded Area as a result of the proposed decommissioning of the Beaver Meadows campground.*

Response: Expanding the size and shape of the Penoke Run unroaded area is not considered in this analysis because it is beyond the scope of this analysis and the need for action is limited to addressing the Beaver Meadows campground. The proposed decommissioning of the Beaver Meadows campground could inadvertently increase the amount of unroaded acres.

Comment 8: *I understand the “lack of use” reasoning over the years but I believe with just the addition of adding 30 amp electric to even just the front sites or the back loop sites would have made a difference to many folks. A long time ago, I was told that a study was done to assess running electric into the campground and was deemed too expensive.*

Response: See response to comment 1. Adding 30-amp electric to one or both loops was given a great deal of consideration. However, use figures show that, even in July, the busiest month of the season, all the campers utilizing Beaver Meadows and Loleta could stay in the Loleta Campground, and it would still only account for about 70 percent of capacity. This has been the trend for several years and indicates that one Forest Service campground in the vicinity of Marienville can more than meet the demand. As a result, we are proposing to decommission it entirely.

Comment 9: *I understand there is a budget to follow which changes year to year. Just wish it included some funding to keep even one loop open there.*

Response: See response to comments 1 and 9. Keeping just the front loop open was also given a great deal of consideration. However, use figures show that, even in July, the busiest month of the season, all the campers utilizing Beaver Meadows and Loleta could stay in the Loleta Campground, and it would still only account for about 70 percent of capacity. This has been the trend for several years and indicates that one Forest Service campground in the vicinity of Marienville can more than meet the demand. As a result, we are proposing to decommission it entirely.

Comment 10: *Does Loleta still draw as many folks? Any upgrades planned for increasing the amperage to 30 amp there?*

Response: See response to comments 1 and 4. No plans for any upgrades to Loleta Campground currently. We have a backlog of maintenance needs at Loleta Campground and other campgrounds on the Allegheny National Forest.

Comment 11: *How is Heart’s Content doing?*

Response: See response to comment 4. Camping at Heart’s Content has generally remained underutilized.

Comment 12: *How is Minister Creek doing?*

Response: See response to comment 4. Use of Minister Creek campground is generally flat, since this small campground has only 6 developed sites. There is only so much growth that can occur. Dispersed camping near the Minister Creek campground continues to increase, and, based on past use and especially in 2020, the parking lot for day use and dispersed camping is quite undersized for the number of hikers and campers. This site will need attention in the current and future years and may require some investments in additional services given its growing popularity as a destination.

Comment 13: *I feel this area has an opportunity for growth with youth programs and wildlife conservation. Have you looked into such programs or grant opportunities to offset the maintenance cost?*

Response: See response to comment 1. There is opportunity for youth programs at Beaver Meadows, and the Forest Service has conducted fishing and boating programs for

youth annually there over the past several years. The Forest Service also hosted National Get Outdoors events there from 2015-2018. All these events have been hosted in the Day Use Area and have attracted a limited number of users, perhaps 15-20 per event. The dam, lake and adjoining wetlands at Beaver Meadows are managed for wildlife, including waterfowl, native fish, and water-based mammals. All of this is unrelated to the campground and would continue without the campground.